

ON HIGH SCHOOLS

# What's in a name? Plenty

## Hastings gym now commemorates longtime basketball coach Sherley



Angel Verdejo, Jr. / Houston Chronicle

Former Hastings basketball players returned to the school to honor their coach Rick Sherley, who had the Bears' north gym named after him Tuesday.



ANGEL VERDEJO JR

Tuesday won't bring back his mother, who passed away Jan. 5.

It won't take away the open-heart surgery his wife needed Christmas Day after she collapsed while playing the organ at church.

It won't take away his own scare — Rick Sherley suffered a stroke a week after his mother died.

But for one night, the longtime basketball coach was able to take his mind to another place. A peaceful and happy place.

Officially, Alief ISD named the north gym at Hastings after Sherley in November. The dedication was Tuesday, bringing together not only Sherley and his family but dozens of former players, student managers, trainers, fellow

teachers and rival coaches to help unveil a banner inside the gym to go along with the signage already inside and outside the building.

### **Overdue honor**

As many said, it was long overdue.

Sherley arrived at Hastings from Pasadena in 1977 and spent the next 25 years averaging nearly 26 wins per season. That total equals 647 at Hastings and 702 overall. He led 18 teams to the playoffs and won 11 district titles.

But after the tumultuous last six weeks, the timing was spot on.

"I got to tell my mother (Constance)," said Sherley, who received the news about his honor in early December. "She was still a month away (from dying), but she still knew what was going on, so it was great that I got to share that with her. And then the rest was good because my wife (Carol) was really wanting to be here tonight.

"She's been through a lot. This certainly helped. The kids and grandkids brought her, and they were excited. I don't think some of them believed me when I told them, but they got to see. Every little bit helps.

"Certainly gave her something to shoot for, and it was a good distraction for me some days. It helped bring our whole family together."

Sherley was a disciplinarian who expected a lot from his players, but he was fair and didn't play favorites. Players knew he was upset when he'd call them by their full names. They also knew Sherley was their No. 1 supporter, encouraging competition while building a family atmosphere.

"That superstar wasn't treated any differently than that 12th man," said Bryan Taft, a 1986 graduate. "He was fair all the way across the board. That's what set us apart."

### **Just short of state**

Hastings never reached the state tournament but was close several times.

In 1996, Hastings lost to Humble 67-65 in the regional finals. Humble's David Boston, a football star who went on to play eight seasons in the NFL, hit a 3-pointer to cut a four-point deficit to one in the final minute. After a Hastings missed free throw and scramble for the ball, Humble made a half-court buzzer beater to stun Sherley and the Bears.

In the next year's region semifinals, Hastings lost to Beaumont West Brook 47-45 in overtime. It came down to free throws, and Hastings couldn't convert.

"I had two or three opportunities to go somewhere else and didn't even think about it," said Sherley, who became the executive director of the Texas Association of Basketball Coaches after his retirement in 2002. "I didn't waste their time with an interview. Once we decided we were committed here, then it turned out to be pretty good."

The Dream Team is still the standard at Hastings. Star post Roderick Brown graduated in 1986, and Hastings lost its second game of the season, bringing doubt and extra pressure. But the 1987 Bears erased it all by winning 28 consecutive games.

"It was such a magical season because Roderick was such a dynamic player. So when we lost him, people really thought we were going to be nothing," said Ronnie Ellison, a 1987 graduate who played at Texas-San Antonio and professionally overseas. "But the brotherhood we had and willingness to fight and be disciplined — what coach Sherley gave us — got us through."

That Hastings team was second in the state when it met No. 1 La Porte in the regional finals. The Bears lost a lead in the third quarter, and La Porte never looked back, finishing its 40-0 season with the Class 5A title.

On Tuesday, the 1987 group signed a basketball for Sherley. Then everyone came together, with players ranging from the late 1970s to the turn of the millennium. They applauded Sherley and his family for allowing them to be a part of them.

"With what he's been through in the last month and for him to be here, we're all just thinking, 'Wow,' " said Darren Montgomery, a 1984 graduate. "This is what it's supposed to be. It's long overdue, but this is what it's supposed to be." [angel.verdejo@chron.com](mailto:angel.verdejo@chron.com) [twitter.com/ahverdejo](https://twitter.com/ahverdejo)